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### The Old Story Teller as a John the Baptist-figure in DeMille's Samson and Delilah

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**CLCWeb Volume 8 Issue 3 (September 2006) Article 2**

**Anton Karl Kozlovic,**

**"The Old Story Teller as a John the Baptist-figure in DeMille's *Samson and Delilah*"**

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**Contents of *CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture* 8.3 (2006)**

<<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol8/iss3/>>

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**Abstract:** In his paper, "The Old Story Teller as a John the Baptist-figure in DeMille's *Samson and Delilah*," Anton Karl Kozlovic argues that DeMille is a pop culture professional, an unsung auteur, and the father of the US-American biblical epic whose production and direction of *Samson and Delilah* (1949) is a masterful exercise in sacred subtext construction. In the public's eyes, Samson is a saintly hero, but scripturally speaking, he is notoriously bad as the last of the twelve judges overseeing the downward spiral of Israel's religio-political disintegration. DeMille, as Hollywood's leading cinematic lay preacher, enhanced deliberately the sanctity of his film by engineering many sacred subtexts into it to create "thick" religion. In particular, he designed the old Story Teller as a John the Baptist-figure to point the way to his construction of Samson as a Christ-figure. Kozlovic identifies elements of this Baptist sacred subtext and concludes that DeMille's skilfulness at engineering sacred subtexts made him the undisputed doyen of US-American biblical cinema and ensured his phenomenal box-office success.

**Anton Karl KOZLOVIC**

### **The Old Story Teller as a John the Baptist-figure in DeMille's *Samson and Delilah***

Cecil B. DeMille (1881-1959) was a seminal founder of Hollywood, a progenitor of Paramount Studios and the most famous cinematic lay preacher of Tinsel Town (see Birchard; DeMille and Hayne; Edwards; Essoe and Lee; Higashi; Higham; Koury; Ringgold and Bodeen). He is an unsung auteur who made the US-American biblical epic his very own genre with such indelible classics as *The Ten Commandments* (silent), *The King of Kings* (silent), *Samson and Delilah* (sound), and *The Ten Commandments* (sound). Not surprisingly, DeMille has been called the "arch apostle of spectacle" (Clapham 21), "King of the epic Biblical spectacular" (Finler 32) and "Hollywood's reigning Biblical scholar" (Friedman 16). Yet, despite these accolades, he is derided more frequently as a success in only popular culture and the box-office, a Victorian throwback devoted to kitsch aesthetics and erotic titillation behind a facade of piousness. Consequently, only scant academic research has been devoted to him (see Higashi), with some scholars claiming that it is "no longer fashionable to admire DeMille" (Giannetti and Eyman 40).

Many of the secrets of his phenomenal box-office success have yet to be unlocked, let alone appreciated and applauded. It is not without significance that DeMille survived Hollywood's shaky foundation (ca. 1913) and helped make it become the world film centre and the name a universal synonym for "filmmaking." During that arduous process, DeMille navigated successfully the death of silent films, the birth of sound films, the arrival of colour, continually evolving technological systems, changing public tastes, shifting leisure patterns, fluctuating demographics, the Great Depression, two world wars, Communist hysteria, and numerous Hollywood crises. Even more impressive is that he did this in a cutthroat industry that was obsessed with profits, resistant to religious control, frequently at "war" with censors and the Churches, and within an unforgiving pressure cooker climate where any box-office failure could quickly terminate one's career. One of the important trade secrets of his success, which is still grossly unappreciated today, was the engineering of holy subtexts into his film narratives.

Holy subtexts (aka sacred subtexts, divine infranarrations) are religious figures coated in secular wrappers to disguise their sacred scriptural origins (Dick), and are akin to the protagonists of Joseph Campbell style hero journeys (Vogler). For example, Klaatu/Mr. Carpenter (Michael Rennie) in the classic science fiction (SF) film *The Day the Earth Stood Still* (on this, see, e.g., Kozlovic, "From Holy Aliens" <<http://www.unomaha.edu/jrf/cyborg.htm>>[inactive]) was deliberately designed as an alien Christ-figure, as was Kal-El/Clark Kent/Superman (Christopher Reeve) in *Superman: The Movie* and its sequel *Superman II* (on this, see, e.g., Kozlovic, "Superman as Christ-figure" <<http://www.unomaha.edu/jrf/superman.htm>>), whilst Thomas "Neo" Anderson (Keanu Reeves), the hacker hero of *The Matrix* was similarly constructed as the Christic chosen one (see Worthing). In fact, numerous biblical subtexts exist in overtly secular films ranging from Christ-figures to Moses-figures, Mary Magdalene-figures to Judas-figures, God-figures to Devil-figures, holy fools to secular saints (see Heller <<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol5/iss3/4/>>; Kozlovic, "The Bible is Alive and Well"). Historically speaking, celluloid religion did not dissipate after the 1950s rash of biblical epics, which DeMille inspired with his "watershed film" (Schatz 394), the 1949 *Samson and Delilah*, instead, it got transmuted, went underground, and was relocated into other genres, particularly science fiction films. Not only was DeMille a master at crafting holy subtexts in the process of audiovisually translating the Bible to the silver screen, but he also went one creative step further. Namely, he engineered multiple, interlocking biblical subtexts beneath his overtly biblical films, including the creation of biblically flavoured, non-scriptural characters for his infranarrational purposes. His unnamed, de facto policy of "thick" religion gave DeMille the edge over his directorial competition, and it was a hidden hallmark of his phenomenal box-office success that is still not very well appreciated by scholars or the public. A good example of his subtextual prowess occurred in *Samson and Delilah*, DeMille's screen adaptation of the Samson saga derived from the Book of Judges 13-16.

Yahweh's famous strongman is the last of the twelve *Old Testament* (OT) judges (i.e., charismatic leader) who oversaw the downward spiral of Israel's religio-political disintegration. This "Israelite Hercules" (Amit 85), this "Israelite Tarzan" (Anderson 200) has been negatively described by scholars as "a rather mean-spirited, biblical Paul Bunyan" (Higgs 113), "a bully boy" (Vickery 61) and "an Israelite gangster captain" (Simon 157). Samson is certainly not depicted in the Scriptures doing any "normal" work as you might expect from a tribal leader, whether the conducting of religious ceremonies, adjudicating disputes, or leading armies into battle (either for God or himself). Indeed, three thousand of his own people from the tribe of Judah captured and handed him over to the Philistines (Judg. 15:10-13) because of his aberrant behaviour as the "Che Guevara of the Sinai Peninsula" (Wurtzel 47), and a particularly lethal "terrorist hitman" (Wicker 42). Most surprisingly, Samson was not a particularly "good" or "holy" man for a specially chosen agent of God. For example, he violated his Nazarite vows of purity (Judg. 13:4-5, Num. 6:1-21) except hair-cutting, the eventual violation of which spelt God's abandonment of him and his subsequent demise (physical, social, ethnic, political, religious, and spiritual). This biblical "bad boy" had also religiously compromised his parents (Judg. 14:8-9), disobeyed their personal desires and endogamy traditions by wanting to marry a Philistine woman instead of someone from his own ethnicity (Judg. 14:1-3), albeit at God's secret urging (Judg. 14:4). He also bossed around his parents (Judg. 14:2, 3), visited harlots (Judg. 16:1), and murdered numerous Philistines (Judg. 14:19, 15:8, 14-16, 16:21-30). He stole from innocent people (Judg. 14:19), gloated (Judg. 15:16), was a vindictive arsonist who destroyed the property of other innocent people (Judg. 15:5) and wrecked maliciously city gates (Judg. 16:2-3), in addition to lying on multiple occasions (Judg. 16:7, 11, 13). When Samson prayed to God, it was only for personal vengeance reasons (Judg. 16:28). Indeed, Samson does not appear to perform any of his mighty deeds for the greater glory of God, but rather, as personal acts of self-importance and/or vendettas rooted in egoism, revenge, and selfishness. Most famously of all, he was a sexual suspect and a recidivist. He pursued three scandalous amatory adventures with religiously undesirable woman. Namely, the unnamed woman from Timnath (Judg. 14:1-3), the unnamed harlot of Gaza (Judg. 16:1), and the infamous Delilah of Sorek (Judg. 16:4-31), who is commonly assumed to be both a Philistine and a harlot (although scripturally unspecified). Indeed, according to Elizabeth Wurtzel, this last biblical pairing was an automatic recipe for disaster: "It is the archetypal story of cross-cultural love between members of warring nations: this is Romeo and Juliet ... she was Philistine and he was an Israelite, and in modern terms they would be a Palestinian and an Israeli; it's not just that their respective peoples are natural enemies -- it's that, just like today, even back then they were engaged in interminable territorial disputes. This is not, say, the fairly usual act of a German and a Jew marrying in 1998; it is the German and Jew taking their nuptial vows in Nuremberg in 1939 -- and then refusing to leave the country as a matter of principle. Essentially, the story of Samson and Delilah is one of fatal love, where someone is bound to die, it is not a matter of if, only who and when" (41).

Yet, in the public's consciousness and Sunday school classes worldwide, Samson is a cultural hero of almost saintly proportions, who is still viewed kindly, respectfully, and reverently because of his honourable inclusion in the *New Testament* (NT) list of God's faithful (Heb. 11:32). DeMille-as-the-people's-director-and-Christian-apologist had to make this biblical "bad" boy "good" by bolstering the sanctity of his Samson, brilliantly played by Victor Mature, the underrated beefcake king of his day (see Babington and Evans). DeMille-the-authenticity-stickler had to be as scripturally accurate as pragmatically possible, while avoiding simultaneously the palpable disappointment of the public (whether believers or not) who (rightly or wrongly) perceived Samson as a biblical good guy. He did this by constructing Samson as a Christ-figure (see Kozlovic, "Have Lamb" <http://www.reconstruction.ws/031/kozlovic.htm>[inactive]) and then complementing that Christic construction by crafting Samson's nemesis, Delilah (Hedy Lamarr) as a Whore of Babylon-figure and a Satan/Devil-figure (see Kozlovic, "The Whore of Babylon") to dramatically and spiritually complement him (i.e., a subtextual Christ versus a subtextual Satan battle). As aesthetically profound as this tactic was, DeMille did not limit this complex narrative construction to his major screen protagonists. With artisional attention to detail, he also subjected his minor biblical charac-

ters to the same sacred subtext treatment in a holiness-by-association tactic that DeMille would repeat throughout *Samson and Delilah* (and much of his directorial career). It thus enabled DeMille to increase the spiritual potency of his demonstrably OT film by infusing sacred NT elements into it that pointed out, complemented and extolled the virtues of Samson -- the chosen deliverer of God (Judg. 13:5). It also enhanced the film's aura of religion, the resonance of authenticity, the mythic potency of its subtextual storytelling, the box-office receipts, and the reputation of DeMille as a master of the US-American biblical epic. A particularly powerful exemple of this narrative tactic applied to a minor role was the construction of the old Story Teller (Francis J. McDonald) as a John the Baptist-figure plying his trade before Danite children near the water well of Zorah. There is no scriptural evidence for this DeMilleian scene in Judges 13-16, but DeMille added it to his film to enhance Samson's Christic status by pointing the way to him in this traditional prophetic fashion. DeMille had artfully crafted at least eight parallels between the real John the Baptist and the fictional Story Teller. The following is a detailed explication of these parallels.

The biblical Baptist was a wild man (Mark 1:6), a public prophet of God (Mark 11:32) who lived in the Judean wilderness as both an ascetic and a missionary zealot (Mark 1:4) baptising people with water (Mark 1:8). His function was to prepare the way for the Lord (Mark 1:3), and in due course he would identify and approve of Jesus during a watery rite of immersion (Mark 1:9-11). In essence, he was just a divinely authorised storyteller who was not to be confused with Jesus himself. As the biblical Baptist earnestly warned: "Whom think ye that I am? I am not he. But, behold, there cometh one after me, whose shoes of his feet I am not worthy to loose" (Acts 13:25). The Baptist preached vigorously and was heard by many during his earthly mission. Indeed, the evangelists "all see him as the one who stands at the beginning of the gospel story, demanding of the hearer a beginner's mind and the jettisoning of all previous securities, so that a new word can be heard" (Wink 373). Not surprisingly, DeMille-the-Bible-imitator engineered subtextually *Samson and Delilah* with a corresponding structural feature. At the beginning of his Technicolor Testament, DeMille primed the audience's mind with new words that were essentially freedom-flavoured, anti-totalitarian propaganda. This political subtext intertwined with his religious subtext, and was itself another signature feature of DeMille-the-auteur, especially his pronounced anti-Communist sentiments, as also dramatically evidenced in his second *The Ten Commandments* (see Nadel).

After his voice-over narration, DeMille presented pro-Samson words (representing freedom) and anti-Philistine words (representing totalitarian) using a storyteller character not biblically specified in Judges 13-16. Indeed, DeMille labelled his storyteller eponymously as "Story Teller" within the official cast list (see Ringgold and Bodeen 342), and on-screen when Samson's father Manoah (Charles Evans) referred to him as such. That is, his screen name was also his function/title/job description and the iconic generic label for sacred knowledge transmission worldwide. After DeMille's context-setting, voice-over narration, and rural background establishing shots of Zorah (aka Judg. 13:2), he opened the dramatic component of the film with a bustling, village streetscape scene containing the old Story Teller as its central focal point. He is sitting on a stepped platform near a public water well and was already engaged in his rhetorical business, rolled scroll in hand. Surrounding him was a small group of young male and female Danite (Israelite) children listening to him eagerly. This mini-crowd scene resonated with the crowds metaphorically who sought out John the Baptist to hear his exciting words (Matt. 3:5, Mark 1:5, Luke 7:29, Acts 13:24), especially in his role as the Baptiser who used water doing God's work. DeMille's old Story Teller proceeded with his religious instruction with the sometimes unwelcome, interrupting assistance of the enthusiastic but headstrong young Saul (Russell Tamblyn) whom DeMille had crafted as a miniature mirror of Samson. Young Saul was not mentioned in Judges 13-16, but it was DeMille's cinematic way of utilising the biblical penchant for skilful repetition as thematic reinforcer. It also appealed strongly to the children in the audience, which would have kept DeMille-the-demographic-marketer happy.

Theologically speaking, John the Baptist "identified himself ... with the lowly" (Wink 372) and DeMille-the-lay-biblical-scholar followed suit in a variety of filmmaking ways. For example, he had his Story Teller sitting down low (i.e., not on a chair, platform or pedestal) in a communal market

setting (i.e., not a rich, opulent, or high status location). Later, a hostile Philistine soldier would call the people there "the scum of Dan" (verbally suggesting their socioeconomic lowness and their status as despised enemy and subjugated other). During a violent encounter, another soldier would drag the Story Teller up from his seated position on the well steps and then throw him down again. This abuse was followed by forcing him up again and then lowering him down again by pushing his frail frame onto the flat muddy ground, followed by a foot into his back (itself an iconic image of political repression). Soon afterwards, a Philistine boot maliciously pressed the back of his neck forcing his face even deeper into the mud (i.e., as low as he could possibly get without digging a hole). Nor did DeMille's repeated engineering of thematic lowness stop here: the Story Teller was working with the lowest of Danite "scum," that is, the children of a subjugated people who have very little power, whether physical, social, political, religious, or economic. Indeed, the soldiers' brutish behaviour towards women, children, and old men itself resonated with despicable "low" acts of humanity (i.e., a degraded morality). DeMille-the-film-artist had engineered as many concepts of "lowness" associated with the John the Baptist-figure as he could, short of actually saying "low!"

There is no direct scriptural evidence for this village streetscape scene in the Book of Judges 13-16, but its construction jibbed with the imagined world of an Ancient Israelite rural community. Nor is there any biblical evidence for the Story Teller character within the Samson saga, but the existence of such a cultural office bearer is not unreasonable, especially given the scarcity of details because of the scriptural preference for brevity. DeMille had crafted the fictional Story Teller as a John the Baptist-figure to tap into the divine-identifying function of the biblical Baptist. In doing so, DeMille was also personifying his own role as a twentieth-century cinematic storyteller, and with the same politico-religious intent as all national storytellers who use the past to shape their future. Both DeMille-as-filmmaker and the Story Teller (as true believers) could be seen as fulfilling God's command to tell one's sons what God did for them during the Exodus (Exod. 13:8). In which case, DeMille emphasised doubly his personal piousness via this act of professional piousness, whether as DeMille-the-ethnic-"half-Jew" (Herman 18), his mother being a "Sephardic" (Edwards n14) "English Jew" (de Mille 161), or DeMille-the-Episcopalian-Christian, his father being an "Episcopal lay reader" (de Mille 161) who studied for the church but was never ordained (DeMille and Hayne 12-13).

DeMille's Story Teller had the countenance of a muted wildfire-prophet similar to the Baptist's iconic reputation as a wilderness prophet, albeit, DeMille's characterisation was less cavemanish. Indeed, he looked physically similar to the old, but energised wildfire prophet Moses (Theodore Roberts) from DeMille silent version of *The Ten Commandments*, thus making the Story Teller resonate with another DeMillean crafted iconic prophet of God who resisted oppression. At one point, the Story Teller recounted God's deeds in Egypt during the Exodus event, particularly, the anti-bondage sentiment that he voiced as: "And the Lord said unto Moses, get you up unto Pharaoh and bring forth my people out of Egypt." The Story Teller pointed out that: "Pharaoh ruled the Egyptians as the Saran rules the Philistines here. ... 'And the Philistines rule us'" [as young Saul interjects], thereby linking the Story Teller verbally with the world of Moses plus the Lord/God, Aaron, Pharaoh, the Red Sea, and God's chosen people (i.e., the major stars of the Exodus event). It also foreshadowed subtly Samson as Moses-like in his God-appointed opposition to the Pharaoh-like Saran of Gaza (George Sanders), especially when DeMille's voice-over narration at the film's beginning advised: "For forty years the Philistines held his people in bondage" (aka Judg. 13:1). DeMille's Samson was later to make the same Moses connection before Delilah near another source of water, the oasis love-nest pool in the Valley of Sorek (aka Judg. 16:4). After Delilah pushed Samson's head underwater playfully with her foot, he responded by referring to the fate of the pursuing Egyptians during the Exodus, namely: "The last people who tried drowning Danites ended beneath the Red Sea." DeMille also made two indirect Moses-resonating connections with Samson. One, in the oasis love-nest, Miriam (Olive Deering) told him how: "The first born in every [Israelite/Danite] home is put to the [Philistine] sword," which echoed the Mosaic account of the Egyptians killing young Israelite children (Exod. 1:16, 22) and two, as a blinded



prisoner in the Gaza gristmill during a prayerful lament, Samson said: "Oh Lord, God of my fathers ... they called upon you and were delivered" (aka Exod. 2:23-25, 3:7-10).

This direct and indirect recounting of the Exodus story on-screen did not scripturally occur in the biblical Samson saga (Judg. 13-16), but DeMille-the-archconservative did it for its politico-religious effect. It was a DeMillean manufactured religious tale to get his political freedom, oppressive anti-Establishment point across to the audience. This micro-tale had acknowledged the unbeatable power of God, the fate of foreign oppressors, and the need, rise, and effect of a God-appointed leader tasked with delivering the chosen people out of bondage. DeMille had provided cunningly a Moses feeling while delivering a Moses story involving a freedom thematic that applied equally well to Samson's subjugated circumstances, just as it had in Moses's subjugated day. As a whole, the Story Teller's micro tale acted as a foreshadowing of the subsequent story of Samson, the Moses-like deliver of his dominated people of God. Structurally speaking, the biblical Baptist had opposed the Roman Establishment publicly, just as the Story Teller had done when he raised his fist against the three bullying Philistine soldiers (who represented the oppressive Establishment, and whom Samson would later call bitterly "Philistine swine" with all its Nazi-fascist overtones). The biblical John the Baptist indirectly foretold the arrival of the liberator who was to come after him (Acts 13:25), that is, Jesus, the divinely chosen Son of God who was an earthly agent on a cosmic deliverer mission to save humanity (Luke 4:16-21). Similarly, DeMille's Story Teller prophetically warned the three thuggish Philistine soldiers: "the power of the Lord is in Samson's arm ... and one day you shall feel it." Samson was another divinely appointed "deliverer" (Amit 85), the chosen agent of God on Earth whose mission was to "begin to deliver Israel out of the hands of the Philistines" (Judg. 13:5).

DeMille's Story Teller (and its John the Baptist-figure subtext) acted functionally as a herald for DeMille's Samson (and its Christ-figure subtext), just like the biblical Baptist heralded the arrival of the biblical Christ in NT times (Mark 1:3). The Baptist's role as the earthly authenticator of Christ was further reinforced by DeMille's use of the Story Teller's word "Lord" in his threatening Philistine warning: "the power of the Lord is in Samson's arm." Since the word "Lord" is frequently recognised by Christians to mean Jesus Christ (Sydnor 84), it dialogically enhanced the Samson-Jesus subtextual link. DeMille-the-American-patriot had also primed the audience for his freedom interpretation during his initial voice-over narration when he directly and indirectly referred to Samson as a "patriot" who was seeking "liberty for his nation." Both the biblical Baptist and DeMille's Story Teller suffered physically at the hands of their Establishment oppressors (Romans and Philistines, respectively). The biblical Baptist was eventually killed by beheading at King Herod's order (Mark 6:16-28), while DeMille's Story Teller was roughly handled and had his head viciously pushed into the mud by brutish Philistine soldiers. Indeed, DeMille even engineered two Samson head-and-abuse scenarios that resonated with both the biblical Baptist and the Story Teller. One, at her oasis pool-cum-love nest, the Philistine Delilah playfully pushed the head of the Danite Samson under water with her foot and two, after Samson was captured, blinded, and made sport of in Dagon's temple, he was eventually positioned between its "sacred columns" literally beneath the feet of Dagon's giant statue (scripturally unspecified but of DeMillean design).

Not only is Samson physically (and politically) under the heel of a foreign god, but when he brings the temple toppling down upon his own head, he is crushed to death by it (Judg. 16:30-31). This combined head abuse and foot thematic was accompanied by multiple water references. For example, John the Baptist performed baptisms (Matt. 3:1, 5, 6) and he did this in the Jordan River, a geographically significant waterway in ancient Palestine. Similarly, DeMille's Story Teller worked near a public water well where Miriam and her female friends were filling their jars and pitchers. This water well and de facto public teaching site is next to a serpentine-shaped drain, half-filled with non-flowing water, which slowly wound through the village streetscape. The three large Philistine soldiers threateningly marched over it when they first arrived. Upon closer inspection, this drain looked like a mini-river system. Its half-filled water level and non-flowing nature suggested that it was not a functioning drainage system or used for any other dramatic purpose in the film. Instead, DeMille crafted it as a visual prop for metaphoric purposes, namely, to suggest the Jordan River, the Promised Land and an oppressive Establishment. This was another DeMillean

act of biblical recreation combined with his auteur penchant for making political statements. The Jordan River was a famous waterway representing the Promised Land in biblical times (whether physically, symbolically, or nomenclature-wise), and so DeMille-the-lay-biblical-scholar capitalised upon this powerful theological association. In parallelism fashion, the three huge Philistine soldiers (three being the biblical number to indicate emphasis, see Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society of Pennsylvania/International Bible Students Association 511) who easily marched over the small serpentine drain (metaphorically, a mini-Jordan), symbolically represented the powerful Philistine Establishment and their oppressive domination of Samson's homeland. Just like Jesus's and John the Baptist's homeland was oppressed and dominated by the Roman Establishment who easily straddled its boundaries. When one of DeMille's Philistine soldiers straddled perfectly across the drain with a foot on either side of its banks, he looked like a giant colossus, itself an iconic symbol of dominating power. DeMille had thus metaphorically recreated this Israelite (Danite) oppressive political fact-of-life in the very act of physically recreating their on-screen oppression through stage props and actor movements. This was another inventive example of DeMille's multi-level, meaning-making, albeit, frequently unappreciated by the critics, then or today. Further, a more subtle DeMille's prefiguring of an NT resonance occurred when Miriam (Olive Deering) helped a cute little girl fill her pitcher at the water well near the Story Teller (the little girl functioned as a mirror of Miriam, just as young Saul had mirrored Samson). DeMille-the-auteur also recycled Olive Deering into the second *The Ten Commandments* to play another Miriam who worked near another public water well and advised others to fill their jars with water). In response to the young girl's request, Miriam gently said to her: "We'll fill it together little Samaritan." The overt identification of the little girl with the ethnic label "Samaritan" instead of a personal name was theologically significant. Although Samaritans were mentioned in the OT, it occurred only once and in 2 Kings 17:29, that is, the fifth book after Judges and obviously beyond the events of the Samson saga (Judg. 13-16). On the other hand, Samaritans are mentioned more frequently in the NT, which had looked upon them more favourably, especially in Jesus's parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:30-37) and the appreciative God-thanking Samaritan cured of leprosy (Luke 17:11-19).

Pragmatically speaking, DeMille's Miriam could have been referring to the cute little girl in one of two ways: as a potential ethnic foreigner, that is, a young stranger in a strange land without local kin (just like the outlaw Moses, but without Miriam knowing her name). Albeit, this is unlikely, and biblically linking the two Samaritan groups as ancestors is historically dubious (Williams 493). And it could have been used as a local Danite term of endearment (of unknown biblical precedence), but this is unverifiable and DeMille's decision is probably unrecoverable today. In any case, the mere fact that the "Samaritan" label was used at all by DeMille was significant. Why? Because it conjured up Christological resonances for knowledgeable Christians verbally, which in turn would have helped consciously and subconsciously foster acceptance of the Story Teller incident as an NT resonating, John-the-Baptist event. Especially considering that in his previous opening voice-over narration, DeMille had foreshadowed an NT association with Samson in the following way: "In the village of Zorah in the land of Dan, one thousand years before the birth of Christ lived such a man [Samson]." Why even bother mentioning Christ in this ostensibly OT tale, unless Christian oriented (i.e., like DeMille-the-Episcopalian-Christian)? Indeed, when Miriam is addressing the thuggish Philistine soldiers in her Jesus-blue clothes, a background figure of a man with long flowing hair is repeatedly seen near her and he looks suspiciously Jesus-like (in his non-interventionist, observer, guardian role?). Again, why do this? Because DeMille wanted as many NT resonances into his OT film as he could successfully get away with without being too obvious, or too preachy, or being too unsettling to his Jewish bosses and audiences. This visual-verbal Christ-Samson linkage was a further canny example of DeMille's multi-layering that entailed multiple foreshadowing, which itself was an indelible part of Cecil's auteur signature.

After a verbal altercation, a bullyboy Philistine soldier attacked the Story Teller viciously by pushing his head deeper into the muddy ground with his booted foot. This scene was a physical indicator of the Baptist's metaphoric lowness, but it could also be interpreted as a negative baptism, that is, a perversion of John the Baptist's religious function, and whose most famous client was Jesus himself (Matt. 3:13-16). In Christian eyes, baptisms frequently have this Jesus-resonant



ramification. More importantly, as the Philistine soldiers are oppressing the old man, one of them nastily said: "croak in the mud old frog." A few moments later, one of the triumphantly departing trio of troublemakers yelled backed calling him an "old mud turtle," and later the Story Teller was helped by the villagers to struggle up on all fours. This DeMille reference to "mud," "frogs" and "turtles" in a cinematic Samson saga was unscriptural, but deliberately engineered by DeMille because it verbally enhanced the water and John the Baptist associations. How so? Because it reinforced metaphorically the notion of the Story Teller as a liminal being, a creature who inhabited two worlds, namely: a) the land and b) the water. Indeed, "mud" is literally the fusion of land and water, and so it perfectly encapsulated this dual nature in one substance. Similarly, "frogs" and "turtles" are creatures that crawl upon all fours, live their natural lives on both land and water, and are equally comfortable in both habitats. Not surprisingly, the biblical Baptist had comfortably inhabited both land and water in the course of his religious duties under a similar oppressive regime during Jesus's time. Therefore, DeMille's Story Teller as a subtextual John the Baptist-figure was deliberately engineered to work on land, next to a water well, with people filling jars of water, not far from a watery village drain, while being physically oppressed by enemies involving mud and amphibian-based name-calling. DeMille's prop, set and dialogue choices were cunning acts of biblical craftsmanship that gelled perfectly with his credentials as a pop culture professional (DeMille and Hayne 195). These DeMille filmmaking choices were not lapses in artistic ability or evidence of his kitsch filmmaking predilections, as many critics are tempted to accuse him of (see Giannetti 19).

When the thuggish Philistine soldiers attacked the Story Teller, one of them grabbed and threw him violently to the ground saying: "You shall swallow your tongue old goat." Overlooking momentarily the tongue reference that reinforced his storyteller function as a public talker, the goat reference was itself significant. According to *Nelson's Illustrated Bible Dictionary*, "Hebrew shepherds treasured the goat because it was such a useful animal ... Goats often grazed with sheep in mixed flocks ... goats were independent, willful, and curious" (Lockyer 56). Indeed, DeMille had primed the audience visually during the opening streetscape scenes when a man is seen crossing the screen with a goat in tow. In the following five ways, these positive goat characteristics were deliberately built into DeMille's Story Teller (who had a white goatish beard and hair to match).

The many local villagers who raced to the Story Teller's aide after he was brutalised by the Philistine soldiers demonstrated their respect and value of this old man (as for goats) at a time of personal danger to themselves. After all, they could have helped him more safely after the soldiers had left the vicinity.

Manoah and Miriam reported the brutalising of the Story Teller to Samson who immediately leapt to his defence before being stopped because the trouble had passed. Thus, strongly implying the Story Teller's intrinsic value (like goats) to warrant the Danite leader's quick and personal involvement.

The Story Teller's cautious but uninhibited religious education of the Danite children about the Exodus event implied that valuable religious instruction work going on, and the Danite's public acceptance of this important work (i.e., useful like goats). Nor did DeMille's Philistine soldiers try to stop this work, as indicated by their dialogic failure to refer to the topic of his talk or its presumably forbidden, subversive propaganda function. They were just bullying him as heartless bullies (and oppressive regimes) are want to do.

It demonstrated the Story Teller's capacity to fit in, mix with, adjust to, compromise and even oppose Danites and Philistines, whether young and old, male and female. Thus, further demonstrating more of his abundant liminal capacities whilst simultaneously showcasing his goat-like independence and co-operative abilities.

It demonstrated the Story Teller's goat-like willfulness and courageousness in defying the three thuggish Philistine soldiers, even though he was old, small, frail, out-numbered, out-forced, out-weaponed, and at a total disadvantage (physically, strategically, socially, politically) when he confronted them (the Story Teller was also the auteur embodiment of the courage ethic so admired by DeMille [see de Mille 162-63]). Overall, DeMille's artisinal choice of the word "goat" to

describe the Story Teller was appropriate, even if dialogically disguised as a Philistine insult (itself another DeMilleian auteur trait). Two important lessons are to be learnt from DeMille-the-auteur, namely: a) never judge a word by its source, and b) most of the words DeMille used had significance far above the putatively obvious, as one would expect from a master biblical filmmaker.

The subtextual deployment of DeMille's Story Teller as a John the Baptist-figure also had another subtle, tangentially related Samson reverberation for the more biblically knowledgeable amongst the public. Scripturally speaking, John the Baptist was a life-long Nazarite who took a vow which entailed that he "shall drink neither wine nor strong drink" (Luke 1:15). Similarly, Samson was under a Nazarite vow which entailed: "no drink no wine nor strong drink, neither eat any unclean thing: for the child shall be a Nazarite to God from the womb to the day of his death" (Judg. 13:7). Indeed, Jesus Christ himself would eventually belong to this intertestamental prohibitionist group because the sacred principle of wine-avoiding eventually applied to him. At the Last Supper he asserted that he would not drink wine again until coming into the kingdom (Matt. 26:29). This vow partially explains why the old Story Teller was not seen drinking anything during his (thirsty?) storytelling work, even though near a water well and holding a rolled scroll (but no water bottle or its equivalent nearby). Although plausible, this may be pushing the Baptist analogy a bit too far. More probably, one suspects that his drinking habits were a potential plot feature not needed in DeMille's cameo scenario and therefore excluded for streamlining and simplicity reasons. After all, DeMille was a popular filmmaker first and a cinematic theologian second, but a master of both nonetheless.

In conclusion, the construction of sacred subtexts was a vital part of DeMille's auteur signature and indicative of an innovative filmmaker worthy of his "master of the biblical epic" tag. This artistic skill also helps explain DeMille's longstanding box-office success. None of his directorial peers could hope to match DeMille's love for the Bible and his depth of religious understanding, and so they could not translate what they did not have onto their own screens. As J. Cheryl Exum argued: "*Samson and Delilah* offers a good example of cinematic impact on the culture at large ... it continues to be influential in forming people's opinions about the biblical story. For all its hokeyness *Samson and Delilah* is a brilliant film" (13). One can only agree with her wholeheartedly, continue to admire DeMille's inventiveness, and decry those critics/scholars who can/could not see beyond their own aesthetic prejudices. In my opinion and as I am arguing here, DeMille is the undisputed doyen of US-American biblical cinema. As such, further research into the emerging interdisciplinary fields of religion-and-film (aka celluloid religion, cinematic theology, theo-film, film-faith dialogue) and DeMille studies is recommended, warranted, and certainly long overdue.

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